Resource Protection and Stewardship of the Land

The diverse natural resources distributed across Washington's landscape are connected, as are DNR's various responsibilites for them.

Forests & Fish

In 2002, DNR continued its work to implement the Forests & Fish Report adopted by the Legislature in 1999. The report laid out new standards for forest management in Washington State to improve water quality and habitat for salmon and other aquatic species. It also recognized the social, economic and cultural values of responsible forestry in Washington State and pledged to keep forestry viable. As a result, new forest practices rules were adopted in 2001.

With these new rules in place, DNR began to work with the federal government to ensure that private landowners who comply with Washington State's forest practices rules will also meet the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.

R. WARNOCK / DNR

Fire Program

In 2002, DNR worked with other agencies to fight wildfire on 68,000 acres across Washington. DNR crews also assisted firefighting efforts in other states. Here, a DNR-managed inmate crew ignites a "burnout " to reduce fuels in the anticipated path of the Olympic Complex fire.

In 2002, DNR established the Federal Assurances Project and laid needed groundwork. A workshop with stakeholders and others kicked off the project; and funding and staffing was secured to support the project through its second year. DNR worked with the federal agencies to develop a work plan for obtaining the assurances.

With the goal of obtaining the federal assurances by June 2005 (set by the 2002 Legislature), DNR will continue to work with state and federal agencies and other stakeholders.

More information about this project can be found through the site map/index on the DNR web page: www.dnr.wa.gov

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans

Washington's private and state trust forests play an important role in keeping streams and rivers cool and clean for fish, particularly salmon. However, forest roads can damage fish habitat when runoff carries sediment into streams. Roads can also create blockages that prevent fish from reaching miles of habitat that may lie upstream.

Although the engineering of forest roads has improved dramatically during the past several years, there are still many old forest roads that continue to threaten healthy streams.

As part of the 1999 Forests & Fish Report, state and private forest landowners committed to new standards and plans for maintaining or abandoning forest roads. In 2001, new forest practices rules based on the report gave state and private forest landowners 15 years to complete the work. Several major landowners have already finished the majority of that work.

However, in 2002, it became clear that for Washington's 91,000 family foresters, the new forest road maintenance and abandonment plans and standards may represent a costly burden.

Replacing culverts that block fish passage can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Such costs may encourage some to look at other uses for their land. However, maintaining family-owned forestland is central to improving salmon habitat.

Working with a variety of groups representing family foresters, legislators and other interested groups, DNR proposed modifications to the existing rules that would continue to provide clean water and good fish habitat while giving families the opportunity to keep their land in forestry. DNR will be working with the 2003 Legislature regarding those proposed changes.

For more information about this issue, visit the site map/index at DNR's web page : www.dnr.wa.gov

Healthy Forests

DNR is working across the state to create healthy forests. Particularly in Eastern Washington, many state trust forests are overstocked with too many trees competing for too little sunlight, water and soil nutrients. As a result, the trees are not growing to their potential, and the forests are less able to resist pest infestations and catastrophic forest fire.

In the summer of 2002, the Board of Natural Resources visited state lands in Klickitat County to see for itself the damage that can occur when pest infestations overwhelm forests and destroy habitat needed for threatened and endangered species.

At several of the stops, Board members saw how an infestation of insects can destroy parts of the forest, killing trees which fall to the forest floor. Some forest stands lost more than 50 percent of their canopy, an important part of habitat for birds and other animals that prefer forest cover.

DNR is working to return such forests to the proper balance so that they can again be an important part of a sustainable forest ecosystem. In 2002, DNR auctioned its largest timber sale ever (18.5 million board feet), to remove damaged and at-risk timber, in order to both begin restoring the balance in a forest damaged by fire and insects and salvage timber value.

DNR also is working to restore forest health by quickly replanting areas damaged by fire. More than 200,000 acres across Washington were damaged by wildfire in 2001. DNR staff worked quickly to sell and salvage the remaining timber on state lands scorched by fire. By salvaging some value in that timber, DNR could afford to quickly replant the forests. This restores a vigorous tree community and reduces the potential impact of weeds.

Continuing to improve the health of Washington's state forests will be a priority for DNR in 2003.

For more information about forest health issues in Washington, visit the site map/index at DNR's web page: www.dnr.wa.gov

(left) DNR, (right) R. WARNOCK / DNR

Geology Program

In 2002, DNR completed a multi-year effort to map the geology of the entire state. The maps are valuable tools for resource evaluation, land use planning, and various earth studies. Available digitally and on paper, and at scales of 1:100,000 and 1:250,000, the maps reveal the overall geology of the state and the underlying characteristics that shape the differences between areas such as the San Juan Islands (left) and the Palouse (right).

DNR

Photo: The new observation deck at the Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP gives visitors a closer look without disturbing the ecosystem the preserve was designed to protect.

Natural Areas

Statewide, DNR manages natural areas that protect outstanding examples of the state's rich and varied natural heritage. New facilities at two of these areas now help visitors gain a better understanding of what makes the areas so special and rare.

In 2002, at Woodard Bay Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) and the Chehalis River Surge Plain Natural Area Preserve (NAP), the public joined Commissioner Sutherland and DNR's Natural Areas program in opening new environmental education and interpretive facilities.

Much of the construction work was carried out by Washington Conservation Corps crews and inmates from the Cedar Creek Corrections Center, jointly managed by the state's Department of Corrections and DNR. Funding for the improvements included grants from the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account.

WOODARD BAY NRCA

The site of Woodard Bay had been a major log dumping facility in South Puget Sound, but its rich natural heritage, including extensive undeveloped shoreline and an active heron rookery, persuaded the 1987 Legislature to establish it as one of the state's first four Natural Resources Conservation Areas.

The improvements completed in 2002 provide for low-impact recreation and environmental education on the site. The new facilities include interpretive signs, outdoor seating for groups up to 30, a mile-long hiking trail, and a three-quarter-mile barrier-free trail. An old logging camp skid shack has been restored with fixtures from the area's bygone logging days.

CHEHALIS RIVER SURGE PLAIN NAP

Located in a Grays Harbor estuary near the Washington coast, the Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP protects the largest and best quality surge plain wetland in the state.

The site provides a vital ecological transition between the freshwater of the Chehalis River and the saltwater of Grays Harbor. The ocean tides moving in and out of the surge plain mix nutrients from upstream sources and marine waters, creating a unique habitat.

The site is a forested wetland divided by a series of sloughs, but a former railroad grade runs along one edge of it. Here DNR has installed a 3-mile interpretive trail. At the end of a half-mile compacted portion of the trail (wheelchair accessible) is an observation platform overlooking Preachers Slough. The platform is roomy enough to accommodate a typical classroom of students.